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ABSTRACT

The Palm Beach Post newspaper in Florida provides a workplace literacy program with six classes in three programs: adult basic education; English for speakers of other languages; and high school equivalency in preparation for a General Educational Development diploma. Employees receive work-release time or are paid to attend class. Class size is 10-15 students. There is also a bonus plan for employees whose skills improve to certain levels, culminating in a $250 bonus for passing the GED exam. The bonuses are regarded as comparable to tuition aid offered for college classes. The Post's goals as a business in providing literacy programs are: (1) increased productivity; (2) improved safety, communications, and precision; and (3) reduced turnover and continued employment and advancement for people whose jobs might otherwise be in jeopardy. (CML)

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ANPA FOUNDATION 1990 LITERACY CONFERENCE
July 22 - 24, 1990
Washington, D.C.

WORKPLACE LITERACY

Presenter: Gale Howden

The Palm Beach Post
2751 South Dixie Highway
West Palm Beach, Florida 33405

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CONTENTS:

Introduction

Program Design.....p.1

Recommendations.....p.5

Budget.....p.8

Sample Flyers.....p.9

INTRODUCTION

The Palm Beach Post workplace literacy program was started one year after the creation of an in-paper literacy committee, which was originally to serve as an advisory committee for a Family Focus reading program for employees.

A growing awareness of the overall literacy problem and the need for newspapers to take the lead in literacy efforts led to the creation of our own program for employees.

We now have six literacy classes offering three programs: adult basic education (ABE), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and high school equivalency in preparation for a General Education Diploma (GED Preparatory). Employees receive work-release time or are paid to attend class. There is also a bonus plan for employees whose skills improve to certain levels — culminating in a $250 bonus for passing the GED exam. We regard these bonuses as comparable to tuition aid offered for college classes.

Our own goals as a business in providing literacy programs are: increased productivity; improved safety,

communications and precision; reduced turnover and continued employment and advancement for people whose jobs might otherwise be in jeopardy.

Workplace literacy programs are critical in solving the literacy problem because the greatest gains have been made in programs where literacy skills are developed with a relationship to the language and needs of the workplace.

It is important, however, to remember that workplace literacy is just one way to meet the challenge of the overall literacy problem. There are many literacy providers in the community who need our support. We, as businesses, can create our programs to meet our own needs but we must also continue to assist those organizations providing literacy services to the larger community.

Pilot Literacy Program
Program Design

WHAT IS IT?

- Three types of classes are offered in the literacy program:

  1. Adult Basic Education (ABE)
  2. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
  3. High school equivalency in Preparation for a general education diploma (GED Preparatory)

- Employees are paid to attend class through work release or actual pay for attendance.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

- Employees may sign-up through their supervisor or through the class coordinator.

- There are specific enrollment periods and rolling admissions - employees may sign-up at any time.

- Teachers are provided at no cost by the Palm Beach County School Board.

- After sign-up, students are individually assessed to determine skills level.

- Classes meet two times a week for two hours.

- Class size is 10-15 students to allow for individualized attention and computer access for supplemental work.

- There is an incentive plan for students who move ahead 4 levels, move from ESOL to ABE or pass the GED exam.

WHY DO IT?

- Changing demographics in our community has brought an increase in the number of workers who do not speak English.

- Basic skills are necessary for effective communication between supervisors and workers and among workers as they do their job.

- A commitment to a literate workforce.

GOALS FOR THE PROGRAM

- Increased productivity

- Improved morale

- Decrease in turnover

THE PALM BEACH POST
SKILLS IMPROVEMENT CLASSES IN
READING, WRITING, MATH AND LANGUAGE

The Palm Beach Post will offer workplace skills improvement classes to employees in reading, writing and math. Separate classes will also be offered for non-English-speaking employees. Teachers will be provided by the Palm Beach County School Board Adult and Community Education Dept.

Classes will address two areas: basic skills and job-specific skills. Classes will be scheduled to meet the needs and time constraints of employees.

Employees will be paid to attend classes for four hours per week. Every effort will be made to schedule these classes during the employees' normal working hours; however, this may not always be possible. Due to scheduling difficulties, employees may have to attend on their own time. In such classes, employees will receive their hourly wage as other pay. In order to receive this pay, attendance must be submitted to payroll with time card.

Incentive Program for Basic Skills Improvement

- Progress through grade levels will be determined through tests administered by the teachers.
- Employees who attend Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes and whose basic skills improve 4 grades will receive a $100.00 bonus.
- Employees who move up 4 levels in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) will receive $100.00.
- Employees who move from ESOL class to ABE class will receive $100.00.
- Employees who move from ESOL class into a General Education Diploma (GED) preparatory class will receive a $100.00 bonus.
- Any employee who successfully passes the GED exam will receive $250.00.
- All employees will receive a certificate for each level completed.

The Palm Beach Post
Inter-office Memo

To: Payroll

From: Gale Howden/Sara Hoffner

Subject: Basic Skills Bonus

The student named below was tested on _____ and is now entitled to the following incentive(s) for basic skills improvement.

_____ Progressed four (4) grade levels in an ABE class (Bonus - $100.00)

_____ Progressed four (4) levels in English in an ESOL class (Bonus - $100.00)

_____ Transferred from an ESOL class to an ABE class (Bonus - $100.00)

_____ Successfully passed the GED exam (Bonus - $250.00)

Student Name: _____

Employee Number: _____

Department: _____

Teacher's Signature _____

Approval _____

Dept. Head Signature _____

Date _____

The Palm Beach Post
Skills Improvement Class Attendance Record

Name _____

Dept. _____

Monday ☐
Tuesday ☐
Wednesday ☐
Thursday ☐

(Teachers: Please check days of class attendance)

Teacher's Signature _____

Date _____

Recommendations

1. For increased credibility, Newspapers should promote literacy programs within their own company as they promote it in the community.

2. Workplace literacy programs should be encouraged because of benefits to the company (increased productivity, improved morale) and to the employees (job security and opportunity for advancement).

3. Each newspaper should create an internal literacy committee whose sole purpose would be internal literacy programs. This committee should include directors and upper level managers from:

Building Services
Circulation
Personnel
Production
Newsroom
NIE

It is important that the publisher or general manager serve on this committee. The committee should oversee and approve each step in the development of a literacy plan.

4. Designate one person who will convene the meetings, research other programs, provide information to other committee members and generally direct the project.

5. Find out what programs and resources are available in the community by meeting with the directors of literacy provider programs. (Ex. The Palm Beach County School Board will provide a teacher if a certain number of employees are signed up for a course).

6. Talk to managers and supervisors of different departments to assess the needs of the employees (for example, will English for non-English speaking employees as well as basic skills be needed). In talking to the supervisors, there may emerge one or two who are sensitive about the employees needs and are very much in favor of a literacy program. This is the kind of supervisor whose employees should be in the pilot class.

7. Develop a program that is best suited to the individual company, meets the needs of the employees and is backed by the publisher or general manager. (The start-up cost for The Palm Beach Post program was around $8,000).

The existence of a union could be a factor in starting a literacy program, although in most instances unions favor such programs and in fact many workplace literacy programs have started as a union-backed program for employees. We have no unions at The Palm Beach Post.

8. Decide on a budget and establish a time frame for sign-up, start-up and evaluation. Work release time and any incentives for progress should also be established at this time.

This is one of the most difficult steps. There will be many unforseen details that have to be resolved as well as minor exceptions to every proposed policy.

This is also the time to decide on desired achievement levels: whether the program will be designed to take employees' skills to a certain level required for the job or will take them all the way through to a general education diploma. (The committee at The Post decided on the latter).

9. If an on-site program is to be established, a pilot program of 10-15 people is a good way to start because a particular supervisor and department can be targeted. A pilot class is also the best way to test the acceptance of the program and resolve any unforseen problems or issues.

The role of the supervisor is extremely important. He or she must support those employees who wish to enroll in the program and must be flexible enough to find ways for the employees to attend class.

10. Before the class is started, the program teacher should spend time in the particular area of work of the employees in the pilot class. This will give the teacher an idea of the level of reading and/or math skills required and he/she will also be able to tailor the instructional program to be more relevant.

11. The committee should meet with the teacher about six weeks after the program has started. This will allow adjustments to be made if needed.

12. Set a date (probably six months) to evaluate the program. All of the employees will take an assessment test to determine reading levels at the beginning. The results of another test at the end of six months will show if the program is working. It should be noted that level of skills and progress are confidential between the employees and their teacher. While the teacher can (and should) report on the general level of reading and skills acquired, the individual level of

any named student is confidential and should not be disclosed to supervisors and managers.

13. If the pilot program is successful it can now be opened to employees company wide.

14. If an on-site program is not possible, the committee can research available literacy programs that are offered off-site. Special meetings for supervisors and employees can be held to inform them of these programs. One person in the company should be designated as the literacy resource person and answer questions and direct employees who are interested to those programs. It is possible to establish an off-site literacy program in cooperation with outside literacy providers.

Final note —

A workplace literacy program is one way of supporting a significant number of our lower level employees who are not literate in either their native language or English. We are also facing the reality of a workforce that is increasingly deficient in workplace skills because of changing demographics and technology.

Classroom Furniture — $2,000

Carpet

3 round tables (60'')

3 computer tables

1 instructor table

3 bookshelves

16 chairs

1 file cabinet

1 chalkboard

1 bulletin board

3 Tandy 1000SL computers	$4,700
3 Panasonic printers	600
Assorted software	500
Dictionaries and miscellaneous supplies	150
	$7,950

Coming this fall...

The Palm Beach Post

EMPLOYEE SKILLS IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

for

Reading
Writing
Math
Computer Skills

Receive 3 hours per week paid leave time to attend classes.

Contact: Roger Schram at 4508 by September 25

NEW ENROLLMENT FOR PALM BEACH POST BASIC SKILLS CLASSES

IN
READING
WRITING
MATH
COMPUTERS

Sign up period is February 19 through March 2. For more information or to sign up, contact your supervisor or Sara Hoffner at ext. 4170.

Nuevas inscripiones estan abiertas en Palm Beach Post para clases basicas en

- Lectura
- Escritura
- Matematicas
- Computadores

El periodo de inscripciones es de Febrero 19 al Marzo 2.
Para mas informacion or para inscribirse,
pongase enel contacto con su supervisor o
Blanca Gonzales en la extension 4190.

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